UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/ICEF/1991/NGO/5
22 April 1991

ENGLISH ONLY

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
1991 session

FOR INFORMATION

JOINT STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY:

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC CHILD BUREAU

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT ATD FOURTH WORLD

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION

WORLD UNION OF CATHOLIC WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

1. The above-mentioned non-governmental organizations (NGOs), preparing for the International Year of the Family, wish to express the hope that UNICEF, which took such an influential lead in the International Year of the Child and in calling attention to society's responsibilities to children at the World Summit, will assume an important role with respect to the International Year of the Family.

2. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted by the World Summit for Children affirm the role of the family unit as the natural environment for the growth and well-being of the child.

3. Yet in its own texts, UNICEF does not seem to have been as assertive on the role of the family. In the State of the World's Children 1991, the child is hardly ever placed in the context of his or her family and community. More alarmingly, the family is presented several times as needing to be given knowledge and skills to work for the interests of children without recognizing its own knowledge, skills and views. The term "family" is attached almost exclusively to family planning and again in terms of the information that it should be given.

4. We have recognized with satisfaction that UNICEF has stressed the role of the mother in relation to the child and that important positive policy changes have resulted. A family, however, is not only the very special mother-child relationship, nor can the empowerment of women be the only factor, although an essential one, to consider in reinforcing the family's ability to fulfil its responsibilities. While the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other United Nations documents and declarations stress the equal responsibility of men and women in parenting, mention of the role and responsibility of the father is rarely if ever mentioned in the UNICEF context. This acquires added importance in view of the present and welcome emphasis of UNICEF on the girl child.

5. The State of the World's Children concludes with a vision of the world in which "every man, woman and child has adequate food, clean water, decent housing, modern health care and a basic education". We feel that a greater appreciation of the nature and role of the family in society could lead to a broader vision of men, women and children in relation to one another, fulfilling more than the very basic material needs.